

**HB 5959 and HB 5804
December 3, 2014**

Statement of Jeff Padnos, President, PADNOS, to Hon. Frank Foster, Chair, Commerce Committee

I provide this statement in support of amending the Elliot Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA) to include "sexual orientation and gender identity." By updating this law with fully inclusive language that protects all gay and transgender Michiganders from discrimination, we will send a clear signal to young people, recent graduates, new immigrants -- basically to everyone-- that Michigan is a forward thinking, welcoming, and inclusive place to live and work.

I am the president of Padnos which provides scrap processing and recycling services in paper, plastics, and ferrous and nonferrous metals with 18 locations and over 500 employees in Michigan. My grandfather, Louis Padnos, founded the company over 100 years ago after fleeing Russia at age 13 and ending up in Holland Michigan. He started as a peddler with a backpack, and three generations have worked together to build the business we have today, with the fourth generation starting to join.

My family is Jewish, and while we have always had a strong relationship with our home town, we were always a minority. We made it a central tenet in our personal and professional lives to treat others the way we would like to be treated. Our grandparents and parents taught us a sense of obligation to look out for others who might feel isolated or alone. Our business has always valued diversity and promoted an accepting and inclusive culture. Our work environment is characterized by collaboration, shared responsibility, and a commitment to zero-tolerance when any group of people is scapegoated or oppressed.

It's simply cannot be acceptable to look away or tolerate discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people. We all have a stake in actively working to dismantle every form of prejudice and discrimination. It is not only good business sense, but it is also the right thing to do.

Moreover, religious faith should certainly not be abused to justify discrimination of any kind. As a member of a religious minority, I have always appreciated how the First Amendment protects our religious freedom, both in theory and in practice. But this precious religious freedom cannot give any of us a right to harm others. Not here. Not in this country.

We are proud to be founding members of the Michigan Competitive Workforce Coalition and proud to support an amendment to ELCRA that protects the gay and transgender community. We urge the legislature to act now.